

Two Poets of the Peasantry

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author, grimly as he shakes his head over the
world, is less
frightened and fretful than Langland. For
him too:

The earth is full of ills, of ills the sea.
But he is at least not tormented with still
deeper anxiety
about Heaven and Hell to come. For him
too man is
fallen; one of his most famous passages is
an account of
the Five Ages and the world's decline from
the Golden
to the Iron. But here too there is at least a
sense of fate
rather than of sin. For Prometheus the
Titan tried to
cheat Zeus over sacrifices; then stole fire for
men from
Heaven, It was in retribution that the Gods
created the
first woman, Pandora. Of her Hesiod
writes rather as
an old Norman farmer might view some
exquisite and
frivolous Parisienne, No doubt she was born
for man's
curse; no doubt Hermes had given her—

Falsehood, and crooked tongue, and heart
of thief.
And yet, crabbed old moralist as he is,
Hesiod remains too
Greek to forget her redeeming beauty.
Langland shows
us, of his lovelye ladyes', only a passing
glimpse of their
longe fynGRES'; but on Pandora each of the
Immortals
had bestowed some fresh fascination; and,
above all, in a
line lovely as themselves, lovely as Botticelli
might have
made them,

'ΟΟρροτ ΚοΑΜΚομοτ ορρυοv &v0ecnv elaptvolai.

The fair-tressed Hours wreathed her with flowers
of Spring.

She was evil; yet how beautiful! The old
man half for-

gives her; like Homer's Trojan elders with
his Helen, and
far more generous than the God of Eve. So
Pandora
brought with a smile, as we, twenty-seven
centuries after,
still read in our nurseries, her Jar of Evils to
the house of
Epimetheus;¹⁸ and with a curiosity both
feminine and

¹³It is typical of the Greek temperament that this
figure of Epi-
metheus—'Afterthought'—should remain dim and
insignificant in the
legend, unlike Prometheus—'Forethought'. They
had that gift of